

## House Republican Press Release

November 22, 2005  
Press Office: 860-240-8700

### **What can be done in the Short Term to Improve Traffic in Lower Fairfield County?**



*Op Ed- Fairfield County Business Journal-  
November 21, 2005, By Representative Toni  
Boucher, District 143, Norwalk and Wilton*

Transportation issues surrounding the Route 7 corridor have been hotly debated off and on for over 4 decades. The original solution to the growing traffic congestion in our region was to build a super “truck” highway similar to I-95 along Route 123 through the town of New Canaan, CT. This proposal was soundly defeated by the residents of this upscale town 40 years ago. An alternative Route was later proposed north of the City of Norwalk, through the middle of Wilton and on the edges of Ridgefield, Redding, and Danbury. Over the years and through long and oftentimes bitter opposition from these communities including the City of Danbury, a super highway design was taken off the books. Increasing environmental regulations and the difficult/dangerous topography unacceptable in the new federal guidelines for highway grades have rendered any proposal a superhighway in this location untenable. So what can be done? In addition to the approved-and soon to be expanded-widening of the current roadway from a 2-lane to a 4-lane road, we have a tremendous untapped underutilized resource right under our very nose: the Norwalk to Danbury train line.

The economic boon to the region that this rail line could provide is clear. In recent years, there has been a rapid growth in business offices and residential complexes along this line. The key to this growth. Accessibility. As residents of the area are able to move between work and home with greater ease, it encourages a highly skilled workforce to remain in Connecticut. This growth is not just limited to residential centers, either. The town of Redding is creating a new Town Center along this line, with the hope of adding a new train stop right in its center. Commercial interests will expand along with the population. The demand is there. This section of rail traffic is among the busiest in the Tri-State area. Governor Rell and the state of Connecticut recognize this, having already approved a 1.3 billion dollar program to upgrade and expand service on the line. Improving the transportation system in Connecticut gives our state the edge that makes communities in neighboring New York and New Jersey so attractive: a comprehensive system of mass transit. This means more passenger cars making more stops at more locations.

Those who suggest that building a superhighway along the Route 7 corridor-Super 7- fail to see the negative impact such a project would have on the economies of these towns. One only needs to look at the freeway situation in Southern California to see that more roads do not equal an improved transit situation. In addition, the residents of the towns where this highway would be placed have been dead set against it for decades. Governor Rell has stated that the plan itself was doubtful. Currently, Route 7 is being expanded from two lanes to four along the same Danbury-Norwalk corridor. This is an effective compromise, but not a permanent solution. What is needed is the development of our train system, along the same corridor, that brings the economic benefits of rapid transportation without the damage to the environment of our towns that highway construction brings.

Representing a town that stands in the path of two of Connecticut's largest cities can be a formidable challenge. Preserving the character of the district I represent is more than a matter of simple ascetics. Many people have moved to Fairfield County in recent years because we can offer the community of a small town with the accessibility of larger cities. When we say that we oppose the building of Super 7 because we wish to preserve that character, it is to keep the economic revitalization of the region from falling apart. Our greatest asset in this state is the education and entrepreneurial spirit of our residents. Improving economic conditions statewide starts with putting the focus on how we live and work each day. Ask yourself: how easy was it to drive to my job today? How much gas or time could I have saved if I took the train? What could make that system more effective in your daily routine? The answer to those questions is the answer to fueling the economic growth of Fairfield County. Above all, the infrastructure of the region must serve our greatest asset: the people who live here.